

**For Immediate Release**

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## Media Release

### **Despite pandemic, students still enjoying fine arts in Charleston County schools**

**Division of Strategy and Communications**

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**Charleston, SC** – Charleston County School District (CCSD) offers an abundance of options for students participating in the fine arts. While things were slightly different last year due to COVID-19, band, chorus, and various fine arts simply adjusted. The 2021-2022 school year looks a little different as well, but fine arts instructors say their students are thriving.

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“We are now allowed to sing indoors, so there are more precautions in place,” said Santos. “The students must stand at least six feet apart to sing, and we’ve installed air purifiers with HEPA filters in every choir room that supplement our building systems that are already exchanging air four to six times per hour.”

Santos explained that other measures include only allowing for 30 minutes of singing at a time. In the case of band members, they wear special musician’s masks while they play and bell covers are used on their instruments. Dancers must distance themselves by at least six feet.

“The arts are alive and well in CCSD because our teachers are so committed and passionate about providing opportunities in the arts for our students,” said Santos. “They’ve done everything they can to keep the arts going whether it is music, dance, drama, or visual arts. Teachers have gone above and beyond to figure out ways to continue to offer quality education in the arts despite the challenges.”

District and school administrators have also been extremely supportive of continuing to offer arts opportunities, Santos explained.

"We have received additional funding to provide what students need such as additional supplies and instruments due to safety protocols," said Santos. "That kind of support is amazing."

Delaney Shorb, the dance teacher at E.B. Ellington Elementary, said that there have been some things students weren't able to do last year and this year, due to social distancing and other protocols, but there have been new twists to their routines, expanding opportunities for students to learn dance.

Last year, Shorb's students performed a virtual showcase of *Frozen*.

"The students loved it because they could still do a full performance that could be viewed by more people than the number of seats in our auditorium," said Shorb. "This year we are still moving forward with our on-stage production in hopes that we can open the auditorium up to a few guests as well as offer the virtual option, which in turn, continues to increase our audience."

Santos said passion and creativity from teachers like Shorb have been what has made the arts possible over the last two school years.

"The arts help our students become college and career ready," said Santos. "In the areas of the arts, we have to continue to provide high-quality education to prepare students to get into arts programs to study in college or careers. This is not the time to slack off and put a hold on this because, for the kids, time doesn't stop. CCSD will continue to offer opportunities for them."

Santos added that during the pandemic, the arts are the very thing many students turned to which helped get them through.

"If we don't facilitate creative outlet opportunities for our own students to learn, we impede opportunities for them to express their creativity, especially in times like this," added Santos. "The pandemic has shown us how important the arts are to our emotional well-being. People turned to the arts when they needed comfort, creativity, and an outlet for stress. That says a lot about what we're doing for our students. We're committed to continuing to push on and become bigger and better."

At E.B. Ellington, they're doing just that, according to Shorb. She teaches all students in every grade. That has its challenges, she said because not every student wants to dance.

Shorb has structured the class to accommodate everyone, and she's seen growth in the ones who were the least interested.

"Dance, specifically, is beneficial to teaching to the whole child," Shorb explained. "It helps students develop empathy towards one another, and they truly begin to care about each other. Dance also teaches students to express their emotions. It

has been awesome to see the students that I would never expect to like dance class be the ones to express their interest in performing. They are the ones who want more."

"This year we are looking forward to creating, dancing, and performing more," said Shorb. "COVID-19 won't slow us down. We're going to do just as much performing and we're looking forward to next year when we can share all of our hard work with the community."

"COVID-19 safety accommodations have been tougher on our music programs than on any other education program," said Chief Operating Officer Jeff Borowy. "Through it all, our teachers have done an incredible job of both keeping students engaged and in sharing ideas on safe practices with district leadership. I can't thank them enough for their 'show-must-go-on' attitude!"

Alyssa Lambert, chorus teacher at Moultrie Middle School, explained that it was hard for her students to stay motivated last year.

"They signed up to be in chorus class so they could sing and ultimately they were unable to sing as often as we traditionally would," said Lambert. "That kind of frustration resulted in students not signing up for chorus this year, which is discouraging. I am hoping to reignite the public's passion for encouraging their children to join a music ensemble in sixth grade."

The Moultrie chorus performed two concerts at the Mount Pleasant Farmer's Market (which is an outside venue) last year. The first performance of this year will be there as well.

"I can't say 'thank you' enough to the district for providing HEPA air filters," said Lambert. "Now my students can sing indoors for a substantial amount of time thanks to the advanced filtration system. Today, my sixth graders are trying out for solos which we weren't even able to do last year. We've had to make as many adaptations as possible but this year I feel like there is light at the end of the tunnel, which is amazing."

Lambert is grateful to the families who stuck with music education.

"Last year was a test of tenacity and fortitude to not give up," said Lambert. "This year we are just focusing on meeting every learner where they are musically and taking them farther than they ever thought possible."

The well-known and historic Burke High School marching band faced similar hurdles.

Director Linard McCloud explained that his historic band program is based on cooperation and collaboration with middle schools which makes for an easy transition.

"When the pandemic hit, it negated that scenario because we didn't have as much contact with middle schools and rising ninth-graders," said McCloud. "This year, we lost kids to disinterest and other reasons. I had 16 students and was only able to retain about four of them. Many didn't have access to WiFi or chose to get jobs instead. I'm sure all schools took a hit with size. The ones who did come back are having to play catch up."

McCloud acknowledged that the pandemic taught him that he and his colleagues are better teachers than they thought.

"We had to do things we've never done before," said McCloud. "We had to find virtual programs that are compatible with music. We had to do what we could to make ends meet."

"In some cases, I am trying to teach everything all over again and it has been hard," said McCloud. "Many of our CCSD bands are still trying to make it in spite of the size and instrumentation we now have. We hope everyone understands that performances from bands aren't the same; we are not in the position where we can do as much as we did in the past."

McCloud said that students are learning to read music again or better learn their scales and techniques. In the case of Burke, it's a lot like starting over, but not quite, he explained.

The Burke band still plans to perform, but on a smaller scale. Some competitions are tentatively scheduled as long as it is safe to travel.

"We're going to have a successful year if we all stay safe and follow COVID-19 protocols," said McCloud. "Our band is working to get better than where we were before. We're going to be showstoppers again very soon."

For more information, contact the Division of Strategy and Communications at (843) 937-6303.

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#### **About the Charleston County School District**

Charleston County School District (CCSD) is a nationally accredited school district committed to providing equitable and quality educational opportunities for all of its students. CCSD is the second-largest school system in South Carolina and represents a unique blend of urban, suburban, and rural schools spanning 1,300 square miles along the coast. CCSD serves approximately 49,000 students in 88 schools and specialized programs.

CCSD offers a diverse, expanding portfolio of options and specialized programs, delivered through neighborhood, magnet, IB (international baccalaureate), Montessori, and charter schools. Options include programs in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), music and other creative and performing arts, career and technical preparation programs, and military.